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**FORTUNES**

**WASHED**

**AWAY**

**A Series of  
Dramatizations  
of Better  
Land Use**

No. 120 August 10, 1940 1:15 p.m.

"THE PIKE COUNTY HILLS"

**W·L·W CINCINNATI**

**United States Department of Agriculture  
Soil Conservation Service  
Dayton · Ohio**

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SOUND: Thunder and rain...

ANNOUNCER

Fortunes Washed Away!

ORGAN THEME: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS.

ANNOUNCER

Zebulon Montgomery Pike, a hero of the Indian wars in the Old Northwest Territory, gave his name to Pike County, Ohio. Except for the rich bottoms along the Scioto River, the land is rough and rolling, with trees and shrubs and vines and weeds dotting some hillsides, ugly scars of soil erosion slashing others. This is a story of that tree country, of land lost and reclaimed, a story of two families, a story of Pike County...(fade)

ORGAN: TREES (softly behind)...

VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

This was Pike County more than a century ago, long before it was Pike County; when the Delawares, the Shawnees and the Ottawas were as thick as wolves in the woods. The tumbling hills of the Northwest Territory lay under a vast expanse of forest, an endless sea of oak and hickories and walnuts; of hemlock, ash, and poplar; of gums and maples. Down below that ocean of dark green a little family of the woods trudged under the weight of its few possessions

ORGAN: Fade out.

SOUND: Jingling of tools as packs dropped...

JUKE

It's a gittin' dark. We mought stop for the night.

AGGIE

A gittin' dark? Hit's been dark all day. Why, we hant seen the sun oncet since we left the fork five days ago. Down under these trees hit's dark as night all day. Look at Wirt, thar!

JUKE

He ain't complainin'.

AGGIE

No, brave little feller, but he's a tuckered jest the same. Hit's most too much for a li'l one, a carryin' them bundles.

JUKE

Well, we cain't stay stopped until we git to the big woods. Hit's a few more treks an' then we'll be in the big woods, the rayly big woods.

AGGIE (explosively)

You 'bout make me cast up my stummick, Juke Teagle--always a talkin' 'bout the big woods. Always a poundin' down the trace to git to the big timber.

JUKE (consolingly)

Now, Aggie, no use to git all riled up.

AGGIE

Ain't this big enough? Lookit the butts! Ten foot through and nary a knot in 'em to a hunderd feet high. Cast yer eyes up, Juke! Not a star nor a moonbean can you see, nor a streak o'blue sky or a sliver o'sunlight by day. And yer couldn't drive a yoke o'oxes 'tween ary two butts yer kin lay yer eyes on!

JUKE

What yer say is so, Aggie...

AGGIE

Course hit's so!

JUKE

Hit's woods as yer never saw in Virginny or Pennsylvaney. But these is only buggy whips agin the old gray beards funder on. Why, I recollect a ash tree that it tuk three men folk to reach aroun' and a walnut that it tuk four.

AGGIE

But what good is sech timber, Juke? Iffen yer clear a patch, hit's all the more choppin', an'...

JUKE (sullen)

I ain't aimin' to do no choppin'.

AGGIE (badgering)

I moughta knowed hit. Yer ain't the choppin' kind. Yer was raised a woodsie and a woodsie yull allus be. But I would like jist a little cleared patch--jist enough so's we kin raise a little meal for some johnny cake.

JUKE (quietly)

Some of us is borned to the woods, Aggie, and some is borned to tend a corn patch.

AGGIE

But not you!

JUKE

They's plenty game in the big woods ahead--deer and bar, painters, cats, wolves, and turkey. We kin trade furs an' herbs fer what meal we have need.

AGGIE (softening)

I knows yull allus keep us in meat, Juke, and I hopes yull come clean on yer promise to git some meal--here an' yonder. Iffen yull jist build me up a shack, so's I kin hear the rain on the roof oncet more... 'stead o' livin' on the ground o' nights strainin' my eyes to git a wisp o' the moon through the tree tops.

JUKE

I'll git yer the cabin afore snowfall, Aggie. An' it'll be warn an' snug down b'tween the big trees. Why, where we're agoin' to stop, the trees stand like a... like a companee of soljers, one 'long side t'other. Yer cain't see the tops... yer cain't see any place funder'n yer kin toss a bobcat, an' down onder, hit's most black as night... at midday.

ORGAN: TREES, softly behind...

VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

Oh, many such a woodsman dragged an unwilling wife into the forested wilderness that was the Ohio Valley country more than a hundred years ago. But his was an honest description of the leafy oceans that waved green and dark. This was the land of trees, where nature in her timeless way had built up the soil, a rich black loam that lay thinly over the undulating hills...

ORGAN: Fade Out...

SOUND: Iron clanging behind....

ANNOUNCER

Then came to Southeast Ohio the corn patch makers, the coal miners, the charcoal burners, the iron makers! When all else was skinned from the land, farmers tilled the soil!

SOUND: Out...



ANNOUNCER (softly)

This was a mistake in land use.

ORGAN: TREES, softly behind...

VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

Oh, today you see these same hills that roll and fold for miles on end. You see scrimpy woodlands, mere thickets of brush by contrast with the forest giants that once spread a wooden blanket over the landscape. You see some prosperous farms...

ANNOUNCER (softly)

...but mostly, you see farmsteads down at the heel; you see field on field, abandoned to nature...

VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

...worn out by misguided farmers and by soil erosion. The fields grow up to brush. If you ask the Federal Land Bank for a loan on this land, they reply...

ANNOUNCER (firmly)

We cannot make you a loan on this farm. The land isn't worth it.

VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

Steep slopes were never meant for farming. Oh, you can farm the valleys and some of the gentle slopes--but not the hills. They were meant for trees. They can be managed in forest farms, or they can be bought by the state and federal governments for public forestlands. But you cannot farm the hills. They were meant for trees.

ORGAN: UP AND OUT.

ANNOUNCER (cold)

That is one story of southeastern Ohio--one lesson in land use. And now, the true story of J. R. Oliver, Pike County farmer, who learned by bitter experience what proper land use means.

SOUND: Fade in motor car running along....

ANNOUNCER

We're jogging slowly up Pee Pee Creek...we turn sharply over a little rise, and...yes, there in front of his modest home stands J. R., ready to tell his story.

SOUND: Car comes to halt....

OLIVER (in philosophical role)

Howdy, folks. Step down and rest awhile. After the World War I had a good job--skilled workman in the shops at Dayton, Ohio. Sometimes on the night shift. Didn't like that...cause I just simply couldn't sleep by daytime. We had a little suburban place, but I kinda hankered for a real farm...well, we got it and it got us. We took on it with a big debt, back in 1930. Nice farm over in Scioto County. Well, like I say, we lost all our savings. Then we had some lean years. I worked at anything I could, saved a little money. One night Myrtle...that's my wife...one night, we decided...(fade)

MYRTLE

I marvel that you have the courage to try buying another farm, J. R. We moved to Scioto County to get rich...and lost everything.

OLIVER (in character)

Yeah, I know, I know, but this time we don't have anything to lose, not much.

MYRTLE

I'll admit, we do need a better place to raise the children.

OLIVER

Sure do. Oh, that farm's about worn out, but it's got some soil left.

MYRTLE

And no house to live in.

OLIVER

I know, Myrtle, that house really isn't fit for us, and I hate to ask you to put up with it, but...well, I've got a funny idea on land and buildings.

MYRTLE

What's that?

OLIVER

Houses and barns, no matter how good they are, won't build any soil. But soil, now, it'll build buildings if you manage it right. And, I promise you, the first thing we build will be a better house.

MYRTLE

That's good horse sense, J. R....and if you want to buy that no-count farm and try to build it up, I'm willing to.....(fade).



OLIVER (fading in, in philosophical role)

Yes, that's the way Myrtle is. She and our three boys, and our little girl "Lu", they all stick by me--or I'd a been whipped long ago. It's more than 4 years since we bought this place--122 acres. We never could have managed it except the Farm Security folks lent us the money to buy equipment and stock, so's we could get started. We had one cow then, but we couldn't keep her in, 'cause the fences were all broken down. There wasn't much of anything else around, neither, excepting rocks all over the fields. But...we plugged along (about a jump and a half ahead of the wolf) and then one day...

SOUND: Kitchen at dinnertime...

MYRTLE (calling)

Stan...ley...J. R....come on to dinner.

OLIVER (fading in)

I'm comin' right now. The boys'll be here in a minute.

MYRTLE

They'd better hurry. The biscuits are hot.

OLIVER (sighing and sitting down to table)

I'm famished. You know what, Myrtle? That fertilizer salesman--what's his name, Kline...well, he told me this morning we should ask the CC camp over at Chillicothe to help us.

MYRTLE

The CC camp...what for? Now, listen, J. R...we're just catching our breath with the farm security loan, and....

OLIVER

Oh, but this isn't any loan. It's about plannin' our farm for soil conservation.



MYRTLE (relieved)

Oh. Goodness knows you could use a little help on soil conservation.

OLIVER

We may be having it now, right soon. That salesman said he'd speak to the county agent.

MYRTLE (reminiscently)

Soil conservation.... Something tells me...(fade)

OLIVER (in philosophical role)

Yes sir, that's how we got started with our new farm plan. That big fellow from the CC--Roy Roller's his name. He came down here almost quicker'n you can bat an eye, and we worked out a plan to stop soil washin'.

ORGAN: Sneak in AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL.

OLIVER (continuing philosophically)

Oh, my wife says I'm "just a little 'teched'" on soil conservation myself. That's because I was always puttering around at it--filling a little gully here, scattering a little straw mulch there. But here's what I tell the boys: take care of the land. If we don't take care of our soil, America will cease to exist as a prosperous nation. We must hold this soil.

ORGAN: UP AND OUT.

ANNOUNCER

That's the true story of J. R. Oliver of Pike County, Ohio, and here is Gene Charles of the Soil Conservation Service to tell us about...well, what is there left for you to say, Gene?

CHARLES

Not much, \_\_\_\_\_, I guess. But J. R. Oliver is a rather modest fellow and he didn't lay it on quite as heavily as I would. Remember, our steep Ohio Valley hills were meant for trees. Well, Jim Oliver's story simply bears out that point.

ANNOUNCER

Maybe I'm not too sharp myself but I don't get it--you're praising this fellow Oliver who farms in a section that was not meant for farming.

CHARLES

Yes, \_\_\_\_\_; that's right as far as your keen intellect has taken you. But you must delve into it still deeper. For example, the ideal thing would be to move all of the residents--at least all the farmers--out of the impoverished hill country. But that is impractical. The people are there. They simply have to make the best of things and, if they move off of the wornout hill farms, they must do it gradually...spread out the process over a generation or two.

ANNOUNCER

I see. And is that what the Oliver family is doing?

CHARLES

In effect, yes. Their's is a case of a man, his wife and four husky children coming to grips with the hard realities of failure and misfortune; of digging their toes into hard stony land. Land that gave up only a niggardly living until they had cleared away the stones, fertilized, and rearranged the fields. Then and only then did it begin to give the Oliver's a more bounteous living. It would be better, no doubt, if Mr. Oliver--and thousands of other farmers like him--were living on better farms out of the hill country. But the fact remains, they live where they live and, if they must stay there and farm, they've got to adjust their farming to the land. They've got to turn the soil less; grow more grass and less' grain; cover the steep hills with trees. They just can't plow every acre and keep their soil.

ANNOUNCER

Gene, I suppose you wouldn't say any of Mr. Oliver's erosion control practices helped him to that more bounteous living you mentioned a moment ago?

CHARLES

You're a poor supposer, \_\_\_\_\_, because that is just what I'd say. Oliver's diversion ditches sidetracked run-off water from his pastures and thus prevented serious washing over his strip-cropped fields. He limes the land to grow more legumes, he adopted 4-year rotations. By sheer strength of his own hands (and with the help of his boys) J. R. Oliver reclaimed several acres of bottomland by putting a small stream "in its place." Mr. Oliver is a good-natured, hard-working man who tries to do right by his family and if you don't think he can work, well you should see him put his 265 pounds into a pitch fork or an ax.



ANNOUNCER

If he speaks with axes and pitch forks, I will take your word for it--even if he is good natured. Now, there's just one other thing that puzzles me.

CHARLES

All right.

ANNOUNCER

You said the Oliver's had had their ups and downs financially. How could they afford to spend money for soil conservation practices?

CHARLES

I'm glad you asked that question, \_\_\_\_\_, because the J. R. Olivers are a wonderful example of a family that is adopting correct land use without much expense. True, the CCC camp helped relocate fences on the contour, but Oliver furnished the fence materials. They built the diversion ditches, a job which doesn't actually call for much outlay of cash anyway. Oliver has bought lime, aided by Triple-A payments. He has fertilized his fields by hauling manure from his stables where 15 Holstein cows constitute the principle source of cash income. Oliver's young sons plow and plant on the contour and their fields are strip cropped. Those are practices that don't necessarily require extra cash outlay. The point is this: The Olivers prove that soil conservation can be done without much money, because they didn't have the money, and they are farming that way--conservation farming.



ORGAN THEME: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS.

CHARLES

This is Gene Charles, speaking for the Soil Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, inviting you to be with us again next Saturday for another story of "Fortunes Washed Away."

ORGAN: UP AND OUT.

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